UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BLM, JARBIDGE FIELD OFFICE
Programmatic Tumbleweed Burn EA ID-210-2007-EA-3477

Applicant (if any)		Proposed Action: Removal of tumbleweed accumulations along fencelines, roadsides, and drainages using prescribed fire.		Serial No.	
State **Idaho**	County **Elmore, Owyhee, and Twin Falls**	District **TFD**	Field Office **Jarbidge**	Authority	
Prepared By (signature) /s/ Jennifer Mata		Title Fire Ecologist		Field Exam Date(s)	Report Date

LANDS INVOLVED

Meridian	Township	Range	Section(s)	Subdivision(s)	Acres
Boise	See map				800annually

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment No. **ID-210-2007-EA-3477** adequately analyzes the impacts of the proposed action and indicates there will be no significant adverse effects on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, no Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

DECISION RECORD

Decision: I have decided to implement the proposed action as outlined in the EA. The removal of tumbleweed accumulations along fencelines, roadsides, and drainages within the field office will help to reduce fuel loading problems and facilitate wildlife movement. I have reviewed the plan conformance statement and have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the current land use plan and that no further analysis is required.

/s/ Rick VanderVoet — 2/12/08
Field Office Manager — Date

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Twin Falls District
Jarbidge Field Office
2536 Kimberly Road
Twin Falls, Idaho 83301

Programmatic Tumbleweed Burn Environmental Assessment
EA Number: **ID-210-2007-EA-3477**

INTRODUCTION

Background: Currently within the Jarbidge Field office, nearly 4.5% or 81,000 acres of vegetation is classified as annual. This category includes a variety of species but is primarily dominated by cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*), tumblemustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), or a combination of the three species. Recently burned and disturbed areas become prime habitat for colonization by Russian thistle. Russian thistle, also commonly known as tumbleweed, demonstrates a highly-effective reproductive strategy; once seed is mature the plant stem separates from the root and the plant is then able to move across the landscape spreading seed as it goes. Often these plants collect in drainages and along roads and fence lines, impeding wildlife movement and causing fuel accumulation. In extreme cases, Russian thistle can be considered a fire hazard, when it ignites and wind carries it into unburned vegetation, causing an increase in fire spread.

Type of Action: The proposed action would include burning no more than 800 acres yearly along fence lines, drainages, and roads within the field office area. The analysis area includes fence lines, ephemeral drainages, and roads within the central and northern portions of the field office area. (See attached map) Approximately 3,561 acres of fence line, 1000 acres of ephemeral drainages, and 527 acres of roadbed and roadside treatment would be considered for treatment over the life of the Environmental Assessment.

Purpose and Need for Proposed Action: The purpose of this project is to use prescribed fire to remove the accumulation of Russian thistle along fence lines, ephemeral drainages and roads within the central and northern portions of the Jarbidge Field Office. These accumulations can become so significant in size that they prevent wildlife travel across the landscape. As they accumulate near fence lines, antelope are unable to move under fences to travel from one area to another. In ephemeral drainages the accumulation of thistles can become so large and dense that they prevent light from reaching plants located beneath the accumulation. This can result in areas devoid of vegetation once the accumulation is removed. When accumulations occur in roadbeds, it blocks passage along the existing road resulting in off-road travel and the possible creation of a new route, parallel to the existing road. Russian thistle skeletons can also be considered sources for fire ignition and spread. The separated plant stem is considered to be a 1-hour fuel which allows for easy ignition when dry. It could be easily ignited when driven

over during the summer. The shape allows for fire spread, since the plant stem will roll across the landscape with the wind, causing fire to spread to vegetated areas ahead of the fire front.

Location of Proposed Action: The proposed action would include treatment areas along fences (10 feet on either side) and within ephemeral drainages and roads in the central and northern portion of the Jarbidge Field Office. Please see attached map for specific locations of current known areas. Due to variability in future fire occurrence and Russian thistle infestations all areas to be treated cannot be delineated. In the case that a new fence line, drainage, or road needs to be treated, and was not previously surveyed, the following steps would be used to identify whether the area is suitable for treatment:

- The proposed treatment area would be delineated.
- The map would then be given to the botanist, wildlife biologist, archaeologist and range management specialist to determine if the treatment of the area falls within the parameters outlined in this document. A form documenting this concurrence would be added to the project file.
- If an area is cleared for treatment, the map would be added to project file to document the addition of this treated area.
- Fuel bed conditions would need to be consistent with those outlined in the Burn Plan and the effects analyzed in this document.
- If conditions and effects are not deemed similar to those analyzed in this document the area would not be treated without additional NEPA analysis.

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan: The applicable land use plan for the project area is the 1987 Jarbidge Resource Management Plan (RMP) which is available for review at the field office. The RMP is accompanied by a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision. The proposed action and alternatives analyzed in this EA conform to the Jarbidge RMP.

Note regarding the Stipulated Settlement Agreement, CV-04-181-S-BLW, dated September 30, 2005 (SSA):

Portions of several allotments within the proposed treatment area are subject to the Stipulated Settlement Agreement as ordered by Chief Judge Winmill on October 20, 2005 in the case of Western Watersheds Project v. Idaho State Director K. Lynn Bennett. The Settlement Agreement specifies interim grazing management plans, terms and conditions for these allotments pending completion of a revised Jarbidge RMP. The Proposed Action is within normal maintenance and is within the theme of the terms and conditions of the SSA.

Relationship to Other Planning Documents

In 2005, The Twin Falls District, BLM, completed a Fire Management Plan which covered the Jarbidge Field Office. This plan outlines fuels management objectives for

areas covered under this document. The proposed project area contains 3 Fire Management Units (FMUs); Inside Desert, Saylor and Oregon Trail. All three of these FMUs contain the fuels treatment priority statement that BLM should, "reduce fine fuels and invasive non-native species infestations."

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 outlines the procedures for Federal interagency cooperation to conserve Federally listed species and their designated habitats. Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA states that each Federal agency shall, in consultation with Secretary, insure that any action they authorize, fund, carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their habitats.

A biological assessment has been prepared for the proposed tumbleweed treatments and the potential for affects to federally listed or BLM sensitive aquatic species or their habitat have been evaluated. The proposed weed treatments would occur along roads and fences and would not occur in riparian areas that are fish bearing or wetlands containing surface water. Therefore, it has been determined the proposed project would have no effect on any federally listed or BLM sensitive fish or aquatic snail species or their habitat. Since fisheries and aquatic snail resources and their habitat would not be affected by the proposed project, they will not be further discussed in this environmental assessment.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE(S)

Description of Proposed Action: No more than 800 acres would be treated annually along fence lines and within ephemeral drainages and roadbeds to remove Russian thistle accumulations in the Jarbidge Field Office. Treatment would consist of burning the material in place unless moving the material is outlined as a measure for resource protection such as for treatment around the *Eriogonum shockleyi* exclosure. The treatment window would begin no sooner than October 15th and continue to occur no later than April 15th and would be covered under a prescribed fire burn plan following BLM Handbook 9214. To prevent fire spread into sagebrush communities, a wet line or other technique will be applied when burning is 20 feet or closer to native vegetation. Any use of hand line would require cultural resource inventory prior to treatment. Important cultural resources identified in the inventory would be protected from impacts through avoidance. A wildlife clearance would be completed on a site to site basis prior to the burning. If the nest of a burrowing owl or long-billed curlew is identified within the treatment area, it will be flagged and avoided. Fences and drainages will not be burned in successive years. Road segments may be burned on an annual basis if necessary to maintain safe vehicle passage.

Description of Alternatives:

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, no action would be taken and management of these areas would remain as it currently is. Russian thistle accumulations

would be allowed to build along fence lines, within drainages, and on roads.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

General Setting: The programmatic tumbleweed burn would be located entirely within the Jarbidge field office, concentrating on areas in the central and northern portion (See attached map). The project area is within Elmore, Owyhee, and Twin Falls counties. The climate of the area is categorized by warm, dry summers and cold, wet winters. The average annual maximum temperature is 67 ^{0} F and the average annual minimum temperature is 36 ^{0} F.

Critical Elements of the Human Environment: Resource components identified by an "X" on the attached lists of Critical and Other Important Elements of the Human Environment (see Table 1) are not affected by the proposed action or alternatives and will receive no further consideration. Elements which are present and are likely to be affected are discussed below.

Affected Resources:

1. Soils

There are over 100 soil series occurring in the project area with 25 associated range sites. The majority of the soils occurring in the project area occur on three range sites: Loamy 8-10 (40%), none correlated (16%), and Sandy Loam 8-12 (14%). Other range sites present at lesser degrees (less than 10% of project area) include Loamy 7-10, Loamy 10-13, Sandy 8-10, Cropland, and Sand 8-12. Water hazard ranges from slight (38% of project area) to severe (17% of project area), but is predominantly moderate (40% of project area). Wind hazard in the project area ranges from slight (3%) to severe (7%), but is predominantly moderate (80%).

2. Vegetation

Sixteen potential vegetation communities occur in the project area of which Wyoming big sagebrush/Thurbers (46% of the project area) and Wyoming big sagebrush/Indian ricegrass (30% of the project area) are the most common. Wyoming big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass and Basin big sagebrush communities are occasional in the project area (8% and 7%, respectively).

The project area is dominated by a dense canopy of weed skeleton cover. The linear features of the project area predominantly traverse four existing vegetation communities: Recent Burn (24%), Annual (20%), Crested wheatgrass (13%), and Wyoming big sagebrush/bluegrass (11%).

Sensitive Plant Species

The project area has a dense canopy of weed skeleton cover making it very unlikely that sensitive plants can occur in the project area. Two species of plants have populations within 100m of the project area – *Peteria thompsonii* and *Eriogonum shockleyi v.*

shockleyi. The *E. shockleyi v. shockleyi* population is within the Thompson Exclosure. Thirteen additional sensitive plant species have habitat of unknown occupancy within the project area:

- *Astragalus atratus v. inseptus*
- *A. purshii v. ophiogenes*
- *Cymopterus acaulis v. greeleyorum*
- *Epipactis gigantean*
- *Erigeron latus*
- *Eriogonum ocrocephalum v. calcareum*
- *Eriogonum shockleyi v. shockleyi*
- *Glyptopleura marginata*
- *Ipomopsis polycladon*
- *Lepidium davisii*
- *L. papilliferum*
- *Nemacladus rigidus*
- *Penstemon janishii*
- *Pediocactus simpsonii*

3. Wildlife

The majority of the areas proposed for burning are seeded habitat, in which quality limits suitability for many wildlife species, particularly sagebrush obligates. The sagebrush steppe community would provide foraging habitat for raptors such as red-tailed hawk, Swainson's hawk, as well as mammals such as black-tailed jackrabbit and pronghorn antelope. Small land birds such as Western meadowlark and horned lark will inhabit these allotments. No Federally Listed wildlife species or their habitat is known to occur in or near the project area.

<u>Sensitive Animal Species:</u>

Pygmy rabbit surveys have been conducted within Clover Crossing, Coonskin, Buck Flat AMP, Horse Butte and L Grassy/Deadwood allotments. Each of these five allotments has active burrows. The remaining allotments would not be considered Pygmy rabbit habitat based on soil and the vegetation community.

Sage grouse active leks are located within Clover Crossing, Coonskin, Buck Flat AMP, Deadwood Pocket, Little Grassy/Deadwood, Signal Butte, Three Creek/Devil Creek, Horse Butte, and Winter Camp allotments. There are several known active Ferruginous hawk nests in junipers in the northern section of the field office that are being monitored annually.

Other sensitive species potentially impacted include but are not limited to: Swainson's hawk, Peregrine falcon, Prairie falcon, Northern Goshawk, Willow flycatcher, Loggerhead shrike, Black-throated sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, Sage sparrow, and Piute ground squirrel.

4. Livestock Grazing/Range:

The project area includes areas within 53 grazing allotments with 33 permit holders (permittees). Currently there are 132,360 AUMs of permitted grazing use in these allotments. Of this active use, 82,405 AUMs are part of interim management resulting from two lawsuits filed against the Jarbidge FO. The 20 allotments under the interim grazing measures in the SSA and Judge Williams order are only allowed temporary-nonrenewable (TNR) use as described in the interim measures. Seventeen other allotments may have authorized TNR use for an additional 15,615 AUMs of grazing use beyond those authorized under the current permits. TNR applications are evaluated and authorized on an annual basis. Table 1 below lists the 53 grazing allotments containing portions of the project area.

Table 1. Allotments within the proposed treatment area

Allotment Name	Allotment Name	Allotment Name
Antelope Butte North	Echo Clover*	Lower Saylor Creek
Black Mesa	Echo Hammett	Magic Water
Blue Butte	Echo Luby	Noh Field*
Browns Gulch*	Flat Top*	North Balanced Rock
Bruneau Hill*	Grassy Hills *	Notch Butte
Buck Flat AMP	Grassy Hills AMP	Saylor Creek/N. 3 Island
Camas Slough*	Grassy Windmill	Seventy One Desert*
Canyon View*	Grindstone	Signal Butte
Cedar Butte Devil Creek*	Hagerman Group	South Crows Nest
Cheatgrass	Hallejuah*	Thompson
Clover Crossing*	Horse Butte	Thousand Springs
Coonskin*	Inside Desert^	Three Creek / Devil Creek
Deadwood Pocket	Juniper Ranch	Three Island
Devil Creek / Balanced Rock	Kinyon	Twin Butte
Dove Springs	Kubic*	West Saylor Creek
East Juniper Draw*	L Grassy / Deadwood	Wintercamp*
Echo 4*	Little Three Island	Yahoo*
Echo 5*	Lower Salmon Falls	
* Allotment included in the SSA. ^ Allotment included in Judge Williams Order.		

The kind of livestock authorized to graze on the public lands within the 53 allotments located within the project area is cattle, sheep, and horses. The majority of the project area is primarily grazed with combinations of both cow/calf pairs and yearling cattle. The authorized seasons of use vary in the area from year round to just a few short weeks. Generally, the southern one third to one half of the Jarbidge Field Office receives spring and summer grazing use while the northern half is typically grazed in fall and winter. Typically, individual pastures within the allotments are grazed in a deferred rotation grazing system. This grazing system provides that pastures used during the critical growth period one year are not used in that period the following year.

Fence locations, including allotment boundaries and pasture fences, can be seen on the attached map. In addition, water is supplied to the project area by several separate water

systems including many miles of underground pipeline with water locations (troughs) and storage reservoirs/tanks scattered throughout much of the area. The water sources for these water systems include developed springs, creeks, and deep wells.

Wild Horses

The Saylor Creek Herd Area is 15 miles south of Glenns Ferry, Idaho. Most of the herd area is delineated by fences constructed for livestock management or separation of adjacent private lands. Land status within the herd area is 83,540 acres public lands, 5,120 acres state and 1,040 acres private lands.

Three home ranges have been established. Two are in the Twin Buttes allotment and one is in the Dove Springs allotment. These home ranges are essentially located in the most remote portions of the Herd Area (HA). Observations of horses outside these home range areas are rare.

An emergency gather of the wild horse herd was performed in 2005 due to wildfire. After the gather, 98 horses were returned to the HA in February 2006. Demographics of the returned animals were 32 studs, 33 mares, and 33 yearlings. Ten to fifteen horses eluded capture during the emergency gather and remained on the HA. Reproduction has been has been low because 31 of the 33 released mares were treated with chemical birth control prior to release. Longevity of the drug is approximately 3 years when reproductions rates are expected to return to normal.

5. Cultural Resources

A total of 156 archaeological and historic sites are recorded in the project area. Of these, 71 are aboriginal lithic scatters and the remainder consist of isolated artifacts or sheep camps and small trash dumps from the historic era. The project area also includes portions of the Oregon Trail, the Kelton Freight Road, and the Toana Freight Road.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives:

Proposed Action

1. Physical Factors
   a. Soils

      Direct and Indirect

      The exposure of soils within drainages, roadsides, and fencelines and the potential for limited amounts of water and air erosion does exist as a result of the removal of the vegetation canopy. The removal of the canopy of tumbleweeds should result in the vegetation beneath being able to receive the sunlight and nutrients necessary to establish a root system, therefore limiting the amount of erosion potential.

      Cumulative

There are little to no expected cumulative impacts to soils as a result of the proposed action. The treatment area is already along disturbed areas such as roadsides and fence lines. In the drainages proposed for burning, there are no other soil disturbing treatments proposed.

b. Air

Direct and Indirect

It is expected that there will be a slight decrease in air quality within the immediate proposed treatment area as a result of the smoke produced from the prescribed burn. There should be very little smoke produced as a result of the burn, since the prescription should allow for quick consumption of the fuels to minimize impacts to soils and the vegetation under the tumbleweed canopy.

Cumulative

It is expected that there will be little to no cumulative impacts to air quality as a result of the proposed treatment. The proposed treatment areas are remote, with no other major sources of air quality impacts to speak of. The amount of smoke expected to be produced as a result of the fire is minimal with limited ability to impact humans or wildlife species.

c. Water

Direct and Indirect

No direct impacts to water quality are expected as a result of the proposed action. The drainages proposed for treatment are all ephemeral in nature and would not be treated when standing or running water is present. Indirect impacts may occur to water quality, as there is a chance for increased runoff within the drainages as a result of the removal of the vegetation canopy. Over time, the removal of the tumbleweeds should allow for establishment of rooted vegetation within the drainages which should reduce the amount of runoff.

Cumulative

Burning on an annual basis in different areas throughout the field office will have limited cumulative impacts upon water quality. Areas within drainages and along fences will not be burned in successive years which will greatly reduce impacts to water resources.

2. Biological Factors

a. Vegetation

Direct and Indirect

The project area is comprised of linear features with a dense canopy by Russian thistle and tumble mustard skeletons that preclude the occurrence of non-invasive plants. Therefore, it is not expected that native plant species occur within the project area to any great degree and implementation of the proposed project will have no adverse impacts to native plants. Removing this dense cover will open up the areas for re-establishment of native species and

would be a positive impact to the native habitat.

Sensitive Plant Species: Two species of plants have populations within 100m of the project area – *Peteria thompsonii* and *Eriogonum shockleyi v. shockleyi*. The proposed action would improve the habitat, but care must be taken to avoid adverse impacts to the existing plants. To reduce potential impacts to *P. thompsonii* prescribed burning will be applied prior to April 15th, while the plant is dormant. The *E. shockleyi v. shockleyi* population is within the Thompson Exclosure. This species is sensitive to fire which requires that the weeds be pulled from the fence and piled outside the exclosure for burning.

The project area is comprised of linear features with a dense canopy by Russian thistle and tumble mustard skeletons that preclude the occurrence of non-invasive plants. Therefore, it is not expected that sensitive plant species occur in their habitat within the project area and implementation of the proposed project will have no adverse impacts to sensitive plants. Removing this dense cover will open up the areas for re-establishment of native species, including sensitive plant species, and would be a positive impact to the habitat.

Cumulative
Targeted reduction of tumbleweeds, on the small scale proposed and with the stipulations set forth in the description of the proposed action, should have no negative impacts on native vegetation and sensitive plant species. No cumulative effects are expected.

b. Wildlife

Direct and Indirect
Alteration or loss of suitable habitat continues to be the biggest challenge in preserving wildlife species today. Fences with an accumulation of Russian thistle and tumble mustard not only creates a fire hazard but presents a wildlife barrier for seasonal movements and travel to water and feeding areas. Big game seasonal movements are usually in response to climate or vegetation conditions. When fences become packed with vegetation, pronghorn are unable to pass underneath and do not appear to have the ability or know how to jump fences. If they are not allowed to migrate in response to food needs, drought, storms, fire, etc., results can be fatal. The tumble weeds are wind driven and are a great threat to the range where fire is a concern. Fences that are not in compliance with wildlife standards also create a barrier for migrating big game species including pronghorn, mule deer and elk. Russian thistle does provided a minimal value to wildlife (birds, small mammals and big game) as a food source and cover at certain times of the year for select species. No Federally Listed wildlife species or their habitat is known to occur

in or near the project area. It is not expected that the proposed project will have a measurable amount of direct or indirect affects by removing the weeds. Some species of wildlife may be temporarily displaced but should return shortly and will benefit with the improvement of the habitat.

Sensitive Animal Species:
Pygmy rabbit surveys have been conducted within Clover Crossing, Coonskin, Buck Flat AMP, Horse Butte and L Grassy/Deadwood allotments. Each of these five allotments has active burrows. The remaining allotments would not be considered Pygmy rabbit habitat based on soil and the vegetation community.
Sage grouse active leks are located within Clover Crossing, Coonskin, Buck Flat AMP, Deadwood Pocket, Little Grassy/Deadwood, Signal Butte, Three Creek/Devil Creek, Horse Butte, and Winter Camp allotments.

There are several known active Ferruginous hawk nest in junipers in the northern section of the field office that are being monitored annually.
If a nest of a burrowing owl or long-billed curlew is detected by a biologist prior to burning, the area would be flagged and avoided to minimize impacts. The drainages proposed for burning do not account for any aquatic species of concern thus making this a non-issue. The wildlife clearance would be completed on a site to site basis prior to the burning.

Cumulative
It is expected that there will be little to no cumulative impacts to wildlife species present at the time of burning. The treatment window would begin no sooner than October 15th and continue to occur no later than April 15th to minimize the impact to nesting birds. The Northern portion of the field office has a high abundance of invasive plants, making the area more susceptible to wildfires, which occur annually. Russian thistle aids in fire because of its ability to burn easily and build up of fuel loads. Russian thistle tends to colonize from off site and thrives in disturbed communities, it can be hard to control with prescribed burning, unless it is done consecutively on a yearly basis and disturbance is minimized. It is expected that the cumulative impacts of yearly burning will have much less of an impact on wildlife than the predicted wildfires.

c. Livestock Grazing/Rangeland Resources

Direct and Indirect
Carrying out the proposed action would result in reduced fuel load and improve the native vegetation within the project area. This could lead to an increase in overall production, nutrient quality and diversity, and palatability of herbaceous plants. Open areas where the tumbleweeds used to be would likely produce more nutritious, palatable forage. This could attract livestock

concentration and result in minor shifts in livestock utilization and distribution patterns. However, because the project area would be such a small acreage on an annual basis, and typically far away from water sources, shifts in livestock distribution patters are expected to be minimal or non-existent.

Burned areas resulting from wildfire are normally closed to livestock grazing for one to two growing seasons. However, the burned areas resulting from the proposed project would be small and, in most cases, far from water sources; therefore, complete rest from livestock would not be required. Moreover, management of livestock would be changed on a case by case basis as mitigation to any impacts. Such changes in management could include, but are not limited to, voluntary rest of the affected pasture by the permittee; changing season of use to graze the pasture just before executing the project and then deferring grazing until fall or winter the following year; or turning off water sources near the burned area. In addition, prescribed fire and non-fire fuels treatments would be coordinated with the affected permittee to initiate changes in grazing management to mitigate impacts.

The potential does exist for damage to range improvements such as fences and cattle guards. If fences buried by the mounds of tumbleweeds include wood materials, the fence could become damaged from the proposed action and become ineffective. Also, if the heat becomes too high within the fire, barbed wire can become brittle, making the fence inadequate. Meanwhile, damage to cattle guards can occur from heavy equipment used during operations. However, if damage to fences or cattle guards does occur, BLM would repair or replace the structures to current BLM standards. The proposed action should have no impacts to livestock watering facilities such as pipelines, storage tanks, and troughs because these facilities are typically away from roads, fences, and drainages.

The proposed action could initially startle and temporarily disturb or displace wild horses in localized areas where operations are being conducted. Initially, traffic by fire vehicles may frighten the horses, causing them to flee from the area into adjacent suitable range. However, it is expected that impacts would be short-term and the wild horses would return to their preferred range shortly after operations are completed.

Cumulative

It is expected that there will be little to no cumulative impacts to livestock or wild horses present at the time of burning. The proposed action is expected to make grazing resources more productive and stable. Removal of hazardous fuels would reduce the risk of severe wildfire, which would decrease the likelihood that such an event would result in longer recovery periods for impacted allotments/pastures. However, wild fire is a frequent occurrence in

the northern portions of the field office. The proposed project, in addition to wildfires, may lead to complications in creating grazing rotations as part of livestock management systems. Nevertheless, with the small size of the proposed project area to be burned on an annual basis (800 acres), cumulative impacts are expected to be minimal or non-existent.

3. Social Factors

a. Cultural Resources

Direct and Indirect
No flammable structures, rock art sites, or other cultural resources susceptible to adverse impacts from the controlled burn of tumbleweeds are known to exist within the area of potential effects for the proposed fuel treatments. Due to the expected short duration of the prescribed tumbleweed burns it is unlikely that sufficient heat will be generated to adversely affect any surface lithic or ceramic artifacts that might be present. There would be no effect on subsurface artifacts.

Cumulative
The proposed action would not add appreciable negative effects to cultural resources. If the reduction of fuels results in smaller, lower intensity fires within and surrounding the project area then the cumulative effects of this and future tumbleweed burns would be to protect cultural resources by reducing the number of sites affected by fire, fire suppression, and illegal artifact collecting.

No-Action Alternative

1. Physical Factors

a. Soils
Under the No Action alternative there would be no removal of the tumbleweed accumulations along road, fence lines or drainages. Increase accumulation along roadsides could lead to more soil movement as the proper drainage off the roadbed would be restricted. The No Action alternative could also lead to an increased proliferation of roads, resulting in erosion and compaction, as the public would be unable to travel along the designated route which would be impassable due to the increased tumbleweed accumulation. The increased accumulation in the drainages would lead to an increase in the amount of bare soil present. The more tumbleweeds are allowed to accumulate the less sunlight will reach the area beneath the accumulation.

b. Air
Environmental consequences of the No Action alternative include a potential decrease in air quality as a result of wildfires. If the accumulations of

tumbleweeds are left untreated they can serve as an ignition source and spreading source of wildfires. Air quality would likely decrease during these periods.

c. Water

Water quality could potentially decrease under the No Action alternative, as a result of increase overland flow and soil movement. Allowing the tumbleweed accumulations to increase, especially along roads and within the drainages, results in a loss of vegetative cover. This cover is important for limiting soil movement and in wet winters this lack of cover could lead to increased run off and a decrease in water quality.

2. Biological Factors

a. Vegetation

There would be no positive change to the affected vegetation under this alternative. The project area would continue to be dominated by a dense canopy of weed skeleton cover. The dense canopy of weed skeleton cover would continue to prevent natural revegetation of the areas. Without removal of the current weed cover, it would be expected that these areas of dense weed skeleton canopy would continue to expand. The affect of No Action on sensitive plants would be minimal due to the lack of known populations within the project area. However, nearby populations may be affected under this alternative if expansion into occupied habitat occurs or if fire frequency is increased due to the presence of a high fuel load due to the dense weed skeleton cover.

b. Wildlife

There would be no positive change under the No Action alternative for wildlife. This project would continue to see an accumulation of Russian thistle continue to increase along fencelines and road. Without the removal of this invasive vegetation a repeated restriction of movement for wildlife including pronghorn antelope would be expected.

c. Livestock Grazing/Rangeland Resources

Environmental consequences of the No Action alternative on livestock, livestock grazing, and livestock range on federal lands are largely the same as the Affected Environment description. However, tumbleweed mounds would continue to exist along fence lines and in drainages and continue to hinder the growth of forage for wildlife and livestock. Also, collections of tumbleweeds at gates in fence lines can make livestock management, such as moving livestock from one pasture to another, more difficult. Additionally, piles of tumbleweeds along fence lines can further degrade fence materials due to greater collection of moisture, leading to increased maintenance costs for BLM and the permittee. Moreover, when the piles of tumbleweeds dry out, they create an additional fire hazard and increased fire intensity. This can lead to increased acres of livestock forage lost due to wildfire. In addition, increased fire intensity and heat from tumbleweed mounds

left to burn on their own in hot, dry weather could destroy the fences underneath, also causing increased maintenance or re-construction costs to BLM and the permittee.

3. Social Factors

a. Cultural Resources

The No Action alternative would result in no direct impacts to cultural resources. However, since accumulations of tumbleweeds may enhance the spread of wildfires there is a higher potential for indirect effects to large numbers of cultural resources due to burn over, land disturbing fire suppression actions, and damage from illegal collecting on exposed sites. The absence of a long term fuels treatment program for tumbleweed accumulations could compound these negative indirect effects from wildfire.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Agencies, Organizations, and Individuals Consulted:
EA was listed on Field Office NEPA log.

List of Preparers:

Name	Resource Expertise	Initials	Date
Jennifer Mata	Fire Ecologist	JLM	2/12/08
Sheri Hagwood	Botanist/Riparian Specialist	SRH	6/8/07
Sheri Whitfield	Wildlife Biologist	SLW	2/11/08
Jeff Ross	Archaeologist	JWR	2/10/08
Dan Strickler	Range Management Specialist	DS	1/14/08
Kate Forster	Fisheries Biologist	KAF	6/30/07

/s/ Jennifer Mata 2/11/08
Jennifer Mata (preparer) Date

/s/ Rick VanderVoet 2/12/08
Rick VanderVoet, Field Office Manager Date

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Jarbidge Field Office

Environmental Assessment No. ID-210-2007-EA-3477
Critical Elements Review

TABLE 1

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT The following elements of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in treaty, statute, regulation, or executive order and must be considered in all environmental assessments. All the following elements have been analyzed. However, elements denoted by an "X" are *not affected* by the proposed action or alternatives and will received no further consideration.			
	Air Quality		Threatened/Endangered Plants; Sensitive Plants
X	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X	Threatened/Endangered Fish; Aquatic Species
	Cultural Resources	X	Threatened/Endangered Animals; Sensitive Animals
X	Environmental Justice (EO 12898) (minority and low-income populations)	X	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
X	Farm Lands (prime or unique)		Water Quality – Surface & Ground
X	Floodplains	X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones (including uplands)
	Invasive, Non-native Species	X	Wilderness
X	Migratory Birds	X	Wild & Scenic Rivers
	Native American Religious Concerns	X	Tribal Treaty Rights

OTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT The elements of the environment listed below are not included on the "critical elements" list, but are important to consider in assessing all impacts of the proposal(s). All the following elements have been analyzed. However, elements denoted by an "X" are *not affected* by the proposed action or alternatives and will received no further consideration.			
X	Paleontological Resources	X	Fisheries; Aquatic Species
X	Indian Trust Resources	X	Forest Resources
X	Availability of Access/Need to Reserve Access		Soils
	Wildlife		Wild Horse and Burro Designated Herd Management Areas
X	Recreation Use, Existing and Potential	X	Visual Resources
X	Existing and Potential Land Uses	X	Economic & Social Values
	Vegetation types, communities; vegetative permits and sales; Rangeland resources	X	Mineral Resources